

The Sunday School

LESSON FOR SEPTEMBER 3

(Editorial.)

Building the Temple.—Ezra 3:10-13; 4:1-5.

The Text Explained

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

The builders were Jeshua and Zerubbabel. See verse 2. The priestly garments consisted of a long, white tunic, reaching from the neck to the feet, with tight sleeves, held together about the waist by a linen girdle. The trumpets were used for summoning the people and making joyful announcements, very much as church bells are used now. The Jews sought as far as possible to renew the service of the Lord after the ordinance which David appointed for the temple. See 1 Chron. 6:31.

11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

The people sang antiphonally, one part singing one line, and the other responding. It was a time of great joy. It is difficult for us to appreciate how the affections of the pious Jew clung about the temple even in its ruins. When the foundations of the temple were laid they were filled with joy in anticipation of the time when they should again worship as of old. The words which they sang are found in substance in Psalms 106, 107, 118.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

Old men who had seen the temple of Solomon in all its magnificence before its destruction. The temple which they could now build must fall so far below the former temple in dimensions and grandeur, as well as in the glory of its furniture, that the thought of it caused them to weep, while the young men who had never seen the former temple, rejoiced and shouted when they saw the new temple rise from the ruins of the old.

13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

The two noises of joy and sorrow were so mingled that the people in the throng outside could not tell which emotion prevailed.

1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel;

These adversaries were the mixed race of Samaritans. They were opposed in religion, race and purpose.

2 Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.

They asked permission to join in the work of building the temple that they might have privilege in its use also. True they worshiped the same God, but not in the same manner. Theirs was after the manner of the Northern Kingdom combined with their idolatrous religion. "Three times Assyrian kings, after the destruction of Samaria, replaced the captives by colonists from the East."

3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.

To have accepted the aid of these people would have been a compromise with an adulterated race, and could hardly have subserved them any good. Geikie seems to think it was a great mistake and a piece of narrow-minded, bigoted folly, to refuse the aid of these people, who would have been friends instead of enemies to them. But Rawlinson calls it "an heroic refusal to accept the material aid of a rich and powerful people at the risk of imperiling religious purity."

4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,

5 And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

The refusal of the Jews to unite with the Samaritans made the latter bitter enemies, and they retarded in every possible way the progress of the work on the temple. They wrote slanderous letters and threatened

to attack them. See Nehemiah 4:1-12. The work was thus delayed for about fifteen years. It was at last completed under the leadership of Haggai and Zechariah, just seventy years after the destruction of Solomon's temple, 586.

The Lesson Applied

1. *To Each His Work.*—The story of the rebuilding of the temple is full of interest and replete with practical suggestions and spiritual lessons. All the people joined in the work of rebuilding. In the forests of Lebanon some were chopping down trees, while others were bringing the timber in rafts to the sea-coasts. Some were engaged in dragging the great heavy beams up the hills from Joppa to Jerusalem. Not a few were in the quarries taking out stone for the foundation of the temple, still others were clearing away the rubbish, making ready for the new building, saving and repolishing the old stones that were in Solomon's temple. What a busy time it must have been, and happy time also, as these people, after their return from captivity joined in the rebuilding of the great temple, looking forward to the day when they might again worship God in his own appointed way. This is a good lesson for the church everywhere, and also for each individual member. We are at work on God's great temple in which each member of the church has his part to perform. There is something for each one to do. Our duties are many and various. This temple is being built out of human lives, lives marred by sin, wrecked and almost destroyed.

2. *Singing and Working.*—As the temple was being built the people sang one to another and shouted for joy. They were happy in anticipation. The singing of the priests and Levites was not only in praise to God, but it also cheered and encouraged the workers. There is large room in God's work for those who can sing. The power of Christian song has not yet been fully appreciated. Soldiers march better and fight better when the band is playing, and so the Christian soldier is encouraged and cheered on his way by the inspiration and power of sacred song. Hundreds have been saved from despair and even from suicide by the beautiful, sweet songs of Christian people. Our young people should more and more cultivate this gift of song, for with it they can do great service for the Master. Sacred song has been the means of saving thousands.

3. *No Compromise.*—The Samaritans offered their services to the Jews in the building of the temple. They were a rich and powerful people, and could have supplied money and labor and thus greatly hastened the completion of the temple. But they were the adversaries of Judah and thru Zerubbabel their offer was refused. Such a compromise would have been a fatal mistake. This is a much needed lesson today. We can not afford to let the world join in the work of the church. Members of the choir, and all our Sunday-school teachers and officers should be members of the church.

Lesson Points

- 1 The beginning of every reform must be in our own hearts and lives.
- 2 The first thing to do is to set up the broken down altars.
- 3 We live in the midst of enemies and we must not compromise God's work with them.
- 4 In the building of God's temple there is work for each one.
- 5 We can do our work better and easier if we learn to sing as we work.
- 6 All our joys are mingled with sorrow, tears breaking in on our gladdest songs.

Illustrations and Heart Talks

Selected.

First the temple is built; afterward the walls of the city—the inner before the outer. The law of natural growth, is "from within, out." Cleanse the heart and all else will be clean.

All national hope for the Jews centered in the temple; when that was destroyed they were captives in exile. Returning from captivity, the first thought was to restore that ruined place where God could once more dwell among them, and which would be

both pledge and evidence of the repossession of their lost inheritance.

So, a temple for his own indwelling God designed the soul to be. He endowed it with God-like qualities, adorned it with graces which shine like precious jewels even among its ruins. But it is a ruined temple! Its sacred things have been put to the profane uses of the world. Its voice of prayer is restrained, its most holy place disregarded; the conscious presence of God seems scarcely a possible realization. Our hope is gone, our inheritance lost, we are captive exiles until this spiritual building is restored.

How can you live without the holy place of communion with God? The best that he has made, the richest gift he has given, becomes valueless after a while if we do not know the Maker and Giver. How can you be at peace with yourself or with the world without his law written in your heart by love in Christ Jesus as it was hidden in the ark of the covenant? Do not say, "the time has not yet come."

Are we dwelling in our own ceiled houses—that is, gathering for selfish ease or pleasure the costly things of earth, satisfied with material wealth and worldly enjoyment while God's own temple, the soul within us, is in ruins, its precious vessels of gold and silver, our time, talents, opportunities used only by the world that has carried us away captive? How shall we begin to build? Just as they did in the olden time, with the altar of sacrifice. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Jesus is the chief corner stone; other foundation can no man lay. In him all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord. It grows. Do not be overanxious about its progress. With the true foundation and the altar of sacrifice in daily use, by the study of the word, by prayer, thru discipline, trial, experience, like Solomon's temple it will come to perfect proportions, surely, beautifully.

Thoughts on the Lesson

Selected.

1. The claims of God are always pre eminent.
2. Christians should glory in the Lord's work.
3. Praise is as acceptable to God as prayer.
4. God's work prospers best when his people are united.
5. All who work for God should be optimists.
6. Never sacrifice principle for popularity.
7. An enemy without is less to be dreaded than corruption within.
8. It is better to walk alone than to have the wicked for company.
9. Let the world into the church and the church will soon fall into the world.

Suggestive Questions

1. How many people returned from the captivity? (Chapter 2:64)
2. What work had already been done and how long before? (3:1, 2, 8)
3. Why did the Jews rebuild the temple?
4. What was the first thing they did after the return?
5. Which is the more important, the altar or the temple?
6. Could there be a temple without an altar?
7. How was the progress of the work retarded?
8. In what way were the people encouraged?
9. What place has sacred song in the work of saving souls?
10. How did the temple compare in size with Solomon's? (6:3 and Kings 6:2)
11. Why were the old men sorrowful, and how did Haggai afterwards comfort them? (Hag. 2:3, 7, 8, 9)
12. Was it wise for Zerubbabel to refuse the help of the Samaritans?
13. Would it be right to accept the saloon keeper's money to help build a church?
14. Should unconverted people be allowed to sing in the choir?
15. Should such be allowed to teach in the Sunday school?
16. What temple are we building?
17. What does this lesson teach us, (1) As to the care of the body as God's temple? (2) As to the comparative importance of worship and a place of worship? (II Chron. 6:18)
- (3) As to the dignity, grace, beauty of worship? (Ps. 29:2 and I Chron. 16:29)
- (4) As to sincerity of worship? (Heb. 11:6)
- (5) As to the kind of worshippers God desires? (John 4:23, 24)
- (6) As to God's true temples? (I Cor. 3:16, 17; Heb. 3:1; Isa. 57:15; I John 4:15)